

Degree/Certificate: Sociology

Major/Option: Sociology

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Date: September 25, 2015

## **Part I – Program SLO Assessment Report for 2014-2015**

**1. Student Learning Outcome:** The student performance or learning objective as published either in the catalog or elsewhere in your department literature.

EWU's Undergraduate Catalog describes the purpose of the Sociology major as follows: "The educational goal is not to train students; neither is the goal to educate students solely in sociology. Rather, the goal is to use the discipline as a way to critically synthesize what is learned in a liberal arts program." In other words, our major promotes all of the "essential learning outcomes" identified by the Association of American Colleges & Universities: knowledge of cultures and the world, intellectual and practical skills, personal and social responsibility, and integrative and applied learning. The Capstone is the culminating course for developing and demonstrating these educational abilities. As articulated in the catalog: "This course is designed to move from a basic understanding of sociological research and practice to more advanced applications in the field." In the Spring 2016 Capstone course, students had to show understanding of key sociological concepts in reading notes and conversations, and apply these concepts in their essays and project. They had to synthesize what they learned about sociology and consider the field's practical relevance for their own everyday lives and futures.

In assessing student learning, I draw on L. Dee Fink's "Taxonomy of Significant Learning," which consists of: Foundational Knowledge (understanding), Application (critical, creative, and practical thinking), Integration (connecting to people and everyday life), Human Dimension (relationships with self and other), Caring (empathy and social responsibility), and Learning How to Learn (self-directed inquiry). Although this model (like any other model) is far from perfect, it relates closely to my pedagogical approach and practice in sociology courses. Particularly in the capstone course, I not only expects students to understand key concepts, but also to use them to develop, support, and consider implications of their own arguments.

In this assessment, I focus on the *project papers* of students in the Spring 2015 capstone course. For this assignment, they had to come up with a relevant subject related to their everyday lives and future after EWU. They also had to use concepts drawing on their *sociological imagination*, which C. Wright Mills defines as "the vivid awareness of the relationship between personal experience and the wider society," and which involves critical thinking about social problems and possible remedies to them. Based on Fink's taxonomy, my assessment emphasizes understanding of key concepts, application to specific cases and examples, integration with actual people and everyday life, human relationships, caring and social responsibility, and self-directed inquiry (learning how to learn). While all of the students demonstrated adequate learning and progress, some demonstrated exceptional research capacities, critical thinking, and writing skills.

**2. Overall evaluation of progress on outcome:** Indicate whether or not the SLO has been met, and if met, to what level.

\_\_\_\_\_SLO is met after changes resulting from ongoing assessments, referencing assessment results from the previous year to highlight revisions;

\_\_\_\_\_SLO is met, but with changes forthcoming;

X  SLO met without change required

**3. Strategies and methods:** Description of assessment method and choices, why they were used and how they were implemented.

I will do a qualitative assessment (using discourse analysis) of student papers based on their research projects. I will focus on specific concepts related to the broader concept of sociological imagination developed by Mills. I collected 7 completed essays by xx, xx, xx, xx, xx, xx, and xx, and will focus on criminalization, double-consciousness, Tupac Shakur's sociological imagination, symbolic interactionism, agency, and ethics of care, respectively.

**4. Observations gathered from data:** Include findings and analyses based on the strategies and methods identified in item #3.

For the qualitative assessment, I focus on key passages in each student's essay that how she or he applies the key concept. In other words, I not only examine to what extent students grasp the definitional meaning of the concept but also to what extent they can use it to make sense of everyday life. While all the students demonstrated adequate learning outcomes in the course, some papers were better than others. I will discuss papers in order of quality, from adequate to exceptional.

**a. Findings:**

1) xx's use and example of "criminalization"

For xx, criminalization means that rules and laws passed to improve society are used against people like migrant workers in Hong Kong. The government seems to only obey and enforce laws that benefit elites, while stereotyping, judging, and putting down members of minority groups.

Applying criminalization to migrant workers in Hong Kong: "Like in the book *Punished* [one of our course books], the system makes them believe that they are the minority group and that they are criminals. There are laws for migrant workers in Hong Kong, but the problem is that nobody obeys them because there are no major consequences. The 'bosses' are aware that they can get away with anything if their migrant worker is afraid of them, but some have more courage than their employer thinks... Erwiana is one of the few migrant workers to actually accuse their employer of discriminating and assaulting her.... Erwiana won her case and her employer was convicted and jailed for 6 years.... She finally spoke up for all the migrant workers and took a stand to stop criminalization and this punitive social control that was taking over their lives."

## 2) xx's use and example of "double-consciousness"

Xx explains that double-consciousness is a concept introduced by W.E.B. Du Bois that refers to the tensions and troubles caused by having to uphold two separate identities for survival in a racist society, making it difficult for someone to develop a strong sense of self.

Applying double-consciousness to micro-aggressions in college institutions: "As an African American college student utilizing my sociological imagination, I believe it is more than necessary to negotiate between [identities] when you are African American at a predominantly white institution, due to the positionality principle. The positionality principle is a process in which tension and uncertainty is caused in a situation because of opposing viewpoints. This relates to the idea of micro-aggressions and double consciousness theory because it can explain the tension one must feel not only with others but also within oneself as a result of having to battle two identities."

"Micro-aggressions unresolved and left to linger can continue to perpetuate stereotypes of groups of people. In addition, micro-aggressions can lead to internalized racism due to accepting the oppressor's racial perceptions which in turn can lead to conflict within. To combat micro aggressions people must become aware and speak out against it because micro aggressions can have a harmful long-lasting psychological impact that may last for days, weeks, or years."

Example of micro-aggression experienced by black male at EWU: "One day while in a lecture hall taking an exam the [Business] teacher asked me out of the rest of the 50+ students to sit in the front row. Immediately I got offended because he was implying that he wanted me to go up there to sit because I was cheating."

## 3) xx's use and example of "presentation of self"

Xx reflects on the internship she did at her former high school, helping middle school students participating in LEAP (a non-profit organization and peer program) prepare for high school and college, assisting them emotionally, and working with the community. At the LEAP meetings, she told students about four risk factors often leading to drop-out and under-performance: attendance, behavior, academic achievement, and positive relationships. She quickly realized the importance of making students comfortable with each other and encouraging them to speak openly and honestly. To explain Erving Goffman's concept of presentation of self, she highlights the terms "frontstage" (where people present themselves in public and try to manage the impressions of others) and "backstage" (where people hang out and relate to their friends).

Example of presentation of self: "During all the meetings of LEAP the majority were girls. We had maybe at most 7 boys during each meeting when the number of members was high. All the boys in the meeting except for xx never expressed their feelings. They mostly acted out and didn't really cooperate with the activity... As much as I would love for all of them to benefit from this great program, only a few actually took it seriously were there ready to learn."

#### 4) xx's use and example of "sociological imagination"

Xx focused on the sociological imagination of one well-known African American rapper, Tupac Shakur. He explains that sociological imagination reflects the ability to shift from one perspective to another, from the political to the psychological, and that Tupac learned from his mother how social problems—especially structural poverty and institutional racism—kept oppressed people down. He cites Tupac's song Changes to demonstrate his sociological imagination:

I'm tired of bein' poor and even worse I'm black  
My stomach hurts, so I'm lookin' for a purse to snatch  
Cops give a damn about a negro? Pull the trigger, kill a nigga, he's a hero  
Give crack to the kids, who the hell cares? One less hungry mouth on welfare...  
It's time to fight back, that's what Huey said  
2 shots in the dark, now Huey's dead  
I got love for my brother, but we can never go nowhere  
Unless we share with each other  
We gotta start makin' changes

Interpreting Tupac's use of sociological imagination: "This exclamation resonates Tupac's strong sociological imagination. Showing the ability to enunciate how other members of his community may feel hopeless and lost in a system of capitalism that has proven to chew people up and spit them back out has proven that... Tupac [had a] powerful ability to use his sociological imagination in a way to create music that not only entertained, but spoke truth about the current state of our society."

Tupac's influence on xx's sociological imagination: "The tragic life of Tupac has shown me that some individuals in society can conduct deviant acts that are seen as criminal in the eyes of some, but that person still may have a vital message to give to others. If people become dismissed from the community because they are labeled as criminal, then society is stating that their voices no longer matter. I feel all voices should be heard, felon or not, criminal or not."

#### 5) xx's use and example of "symbolic interactionism"

Xx describes symbolic interactionism as a theoretical approach studying how people construct their realities and sense of self through language, symbols, and interaction. She uses this concept to make sense of her interactions with her cousin xx, who was placed in a local asylum (Eastern Washington State Hospital) after having a bad reaction to methamphetamine. Xx's research project is a powerful example of using sociology to gain understanding of painful personal traumas and relationships.

Example of symbolic interactionism at the asylum: "In conversations I had with xx, I remember her telling me that she depended on my visits with her, because as she kept

spending time in the asylum she felt more and more crazy... When the institution calls them victims, and they see them as victims, they will believe that they themselves are victims. I feel like this is the same for the situation that xx is in. But maybe when I come to visit her xx doesn't feel crazy anymore. Maybe she just feels like xx. She can have a different reality than the one that she experiences at the asylum. Whenever I talk to her, I make sure that I am not pitying her or treating her as a victim because I know that would only enforce the reality that is being created for her at the asylum.... I feel like the institution should be focusing on healing when they are leaning more towards the free market than care. People working at the institution see patients more as clients rather than seeing them as people that need help."

#### 6) xx's use and example of "ethics of care"

Xx interprets ethics of care, a concept emerging from feminist sociology, as building interpersonal relationships and community life based on values and practices of attentiveness, responsibility, competence, and responsiveness. She focuses on how the restaurant Casper Fry, located in Spokane's South Perry district, implements an ethics of care in its "food politics." Xx does a great job of using her sociological imagination to explore everyday life at Casper Fry, where she has worked for several years. She also clearly sees food politics as an important part of her own future and vocation.

Examples of ethics of care at Casper Fry: "What separates sustainable-minded businesses from corporate business clones are their stories. Entering a space and owning it, in the sense of making it personal and intimate takes more than monetary investment... Locally-owned businesses which have been designed by someone from the community with the intention of supporting the community come with a story and a purpose.... [Head chef] xx experience and personality are evident on his menu design and in the food he sends out of the kitchen.... Many of the dishes he creates are vegetarian and vegan, making them easy to adapt for a growing population of vegetarians and vegans... On each menu he has added a vegan dish; having been a member of the vegetarian/vegan community in Spokane he feels obligated to provide for them and to break free of the constraints established by the kitchen.... Xx is answer the responses of vegetarians and vegans who have come into the restaurant seeking a different experience. He recognizes their needs and is actively responding to them by offering multiple options for their dietary restrictions on his menu and in the restaurant."

#### 7) xx's use and example of "ethics of care"

Xx's project paper is exceptional in many ways. Her introduction immediately grabs the reader's attention by starting with a story of a patient waking up in the pediatric psychiatry floor of a local hospital, where she is doing an internship as medical social worker. She clearly articulates what ethics of care means for her: "It addresses how to respond appropriately based on the well-being of the vulnerable and how we should act with compassion to restore human dignity... We have lost sight of caring in favor of financial gain." Like xx, she also describes its four basic elements—attentiveness, attentiveness, competence, and responsiveness—and relates them directly to interactions

between care providers and care receivers. Her project focuses on medical social workers trying to put the ethics of care into practice despite the monetary and bureaucratic pressures of the profession. In many ways, xx's paper exemplifies the kind of "significant learning" that I (as educator) seek to encourage.

Examples of ethics of care as medical social worker: "Just recently I began a job shadow with the social work department in the pediatric psychiatry unit of a local hospital. The typical age for kids on that unit is about 13 to 17 years old. Stories like the one in the introduction are situations that hospital social workers have to deal with on a regular basis. I entered the job shadow with the ethics of care elements in my head and I wanted to see how easy or difficult they were to execute on a day to day basis in a crisis care facility. What I found wasn't very surprising for the most part. There are regulations for how long patients can stay in there, for what facilities they can be sent to based on their insurance, and for what we legally have to do with patients in regards to their parents and leaving the hospital."

"Over the course of my shadow I saw many instances that would be in violation of the ethics of care. I saw several instances where social workers were not very attentive to the patient and were not listening to them one hundred percent. I think this tends to happen mainly because as a social worker you hear so many situations that are very similar to one another... I also saw many instances where the responsibility issue came into question... Many of the social workers I shadowed had been doing that type of work for a long time and seemed to have lost the caring aspect of the job. It wasn't until I met one social worker in particular that a little bit of hope came back into my heart... I asked her how she remained hopeful and how she kept herself going and caring for these patients... She said that it was very difficult at times but she constantly found little ways that she could help outside of the system."

#### **b. Analysis of findings:**

xx shows basic understanding of the sociological aspects of criminalization, indicating how it affects migrant workers in Hong Kong. She demonstrates that she has learned from her visit to Hong Kong and can see that the personal troubles of migrant workers like xx are intertwined with broader social problems. But although her work is sufficient, it does not go into much depth on her concepts, experiences, or examples.

Xx uses the concept of double-consciousness to make sense of micro-aggressions that she and other African American students experience at college institutions such as EWU. She did some survey research and examined a few of the stories told by fellow African American students, demonstrating that she has thought about the personal implications and social contexts of micro-aggression. While her project paper is adequate, it stays within the limits of basic interpretations of her concepts and findings.

Xx adopts Goffman's notion of presentation of self to study her interactions with middle and high school students participating in the LEAP program. She did extensive research and clearly cares about the students she worked with, but like xx and xx she does not elaborate on what key ideas mean to her and how they apply to concrete examples.

Xx uses the concept of sociological imagination to explore Tupac's responses to poverty

and racism in US society. His project is original, while his writing is clear and passionate. He also does a great job of considering Tupac's influence on him, a white male from a middle-class family. But he could do more to develop his arguments and clarify his own perspectives on the sociological concepts he uses.

In my view, the project papers by xx, xx, and xx rise above the others. Besides doing extensive qualitative research on her visits to the asylum, xx does a good job of using the symbolic interactionism approach to develop her own ideas and perspectives. Although her writing is not as polished as xx's or xx's she clearly demonstrates Fink's 6 aspects of significant learning: foundational knowledge, application, integration (connecting ideas with everyday life), the human dimension, caring, and self-directed inquiry.

Xx's project paper on the local restaurant where she works is exceptional, because she is able to combine her own narrative and the narratives of the people she studies with sociological interpretation and analysis. For her, the ethics of care is not just an abstract concept but has become a way of life that she will continue pursuing after graduation, by studying and contributing to food communities. Although her organization is not quite as coherent as xx's, she has certainly fulfilled the main purpose of the capstone course: exploring the relevance of sociology for everyday life and local communities.

And finally, xx's project paper is one of the best I have read in my 12 years as professor at EWU. It reflects the kind of critical thinking, ethnographic research, and creative writing that makes working with sociology majors worthwhile. She shows deep understanding of sociological ideas, compassion for the people she studies, and capacity for learning from caring practitioners about how to achieve meaningful social change. Her paper's conclusion says it best: "I don't believe that social workers, or any of us for that matter, have lost the will to care. It's still there, but it's just one more thing that has been shifted to the back in favor of economic greed... Like everything else, capitalism has made its mark on the field of social work and until that changes it will continue to suffer. Unless we can find small ways to avoid parts of the system and get things done on our own."

Based on my qualitative analysis, I argue that 3 students did "excellent" work (xx, xx, and xx); 2 students did "very good" work (xx and xx); and 2 students did "adequate" work (xx and xx). Overall, I am satisfied with the performance in the Spring 2015 Capstone in Sociology course, which strongly reflects what Sociology majors have learned during their Sociology courses at EWU. Although there is always room for improvement, I see no reason for dramatic changes in the course.

## **5. What program changes will be made based on the assessment results?**

a) Describe plans to improve student learning based on assessment findings (e.g., course content, course sequencing, curriculum revision, learning environment or student advising).

Although I don't feel that much has to change, I can continue to improve on paying more in-depth attention to key sociological concepts during the course. By making some changes in lesson plans, I can try to indicate how significant and relevant sociological

theorizing really is for shaping everyday life and responding to social situations. The Sociology major already pays more attention to theory and critical thinking than most majors, but we can always continue to improve our pedagogical approaches. As for course content, students indicated that they learned a great deal from our first book (*Punished* by Victor Rios), but not as much from our second book (*Digital Dead End* by Virginia Eubanks). So as teacher of the Capstone in Sociology course, I will continue to use *Punished*, but look for another book that does a better job of allowing students to think deeply about the relevance of the sociological imagination in personal and social life.

b) Provide a broad timeline of how and when identified changes will be addressed in the upcoming year.

I will make necessary changes to the Capstone course in Spring of 2016.

**6. Description of revisions to the assessment process the results suggest are needed and an evaluation of the assessment plan/process itself.**

Although not the conventional way of doing a program's SLO assessment, I am satisfied that qualitative analysis allows for deeper and more useful insights into the student learning process and possibilities for improvement. I am considering using self-assessment essays by students to improve my evaluation of significant learning in the future. (Since my 2013-2014 program assessment report indicated that no significant changes were required, the follow-up section "Closing the Loop" is not applicable.)